648 to open talks with Voulet. This poor political judgment cost him his crown. Binger had been preceded in Ouagadougou by Dr. Krause, who in 1885 was the first European allowed to enter the capital; Von François, coming from German Togoland in 1887, was stopped at the first Mossi village. As already mentioned, Binger, not without difficulty, managed to reach Ouagadougou in 1888. He stayed there for some time, longer than he had wished, and it was by virtue of his admirable energy that he was able to resume his journey toward the south. In 1890 Dr. Crozat was received for the first time by the Moro Naba, but he had to leave Ouagadougou speedily. The following year Monteil did not even manage to reach the capital. He was stopped a few kilometers from it and forced to depart abruptly. The mulatto Fergusson, in the service of the British, reached Ouagadougou by way of Tenkodogo, Nyaogo, and Kombisgri. Von Carnap, a German, came from Sansané-Mango in 1897 and visited Tenkodogo and Koupéla.

114 Such are, in brief outline, the verified contacts of the Mossi with Europeans. Were they already known by John II of Portugal, and even by John III, in the sixteenth century? Did they come from far to the east, from Sokoto, Bornu, perhaps even from Wadai? There are so many questions that seem quite mysterious to us in the present state of our knowledge of these peoples of the bend of the Niger, who lack written traditions. Lt. Marc discusses at great length the various opinions on this subject in his book, Au pays des Mossi /In Mossi Country/, chapters 1 and 7. Delafosse presents his own opinion in his work on Upper Senegal and Niger (especially in volume 2). We shall limit this account to the traditions gathered from the natives themselves.

124 Our working method, indeed, has been to question as many natives as possible and to gather their statements on all matters which seemed of interest. We have avoided any "interpretation" of the facts. We have allowed the natives to talk, to tell their story, to describe /3/ their customs, to explain the phenomena of nature and of life as they understand them. Our role was limited to a day-to-day record of what we heard, to the inducement of explanations, to the arrangement of these notes. Of course, our questions sometimes remained unanswered. We shall leave them unanswered here. Having no plan to defend, we hope to have been sufficiently objective.

114 We shall, nevertheless, be happy if this modest work makes a small contribution to the study of regional history, so heavily stressed

596 under the supervision of the husband's first wife; the daughters are never their own masters at any age and thus live in semi-slavery. The children do not spend much time together. They undoubtedly have affection for each other and show it at times, and their parents love them, but there does not exist among them that bond, that family spirit which only Christianity can bring them.

/77/ BOOK IV. RELIGIOUS LIFE

Chapter 1. Beliefs and Ethics

000 We have studied so far the external manifestations of Mossi life: the political structure and its hierarchy, the family structure and all its derivatives, marriage, birth, life, and death. We must now take a further step and carry our investigation to a more intimate level, to analyze the deepest and most persistent feelings and attitudes of these people. It is very difficult to understand one individual and to grasp the motives for his actions in everyday life; it is all the more difficult to do so in the case of a people, especially when this people does not practice self-analysis and when no writings exist to reflect its soul, which must be detected in its most spontaneous manifestations, in the most commonplace conversations. We would, however, know almost nothing about the Mossi if we did not know their ideas about God, the world, and ancestral and other spirits, as well as the relationships they have established with this invisible world. Religious life plays a very important role in the life of any people. Would it be an exaggeration to state that the significance of its role increases with the primitiveness of the people and their resulting tendency to attribute all they cannot explain to preternatural intervention?

124 The Mossi do not like to broach these subjects with foreigners, especially with Whites, whose beliefs they know to be so different from theirs. Not only are they afraid to offend the spirits by revealing their secrets, but they fear the derisive smile. One must be careful not to laugh at their ideas, no matter how childish they may seem to us. To laugh at them is the surest way of hurting their feelings and of making them hopelessly secretive. In any case, is not sincere belief worthy of some respect, even if this respect is mixed with a certain amount of pity?

124 The problem is aggravated by the fact that the Mossi possess no religious theories and are not in the habit of discussing their beliefs. They are bewildered by the slightest "Why," the most elementary "how is it so." To fulfill the needs of our European minds, therefore, it proved necessary to put a little order and clarity into the ideas we gleaned here and there. In this area especially we have avoided as much as possible any tendency to systematize, and we can say that there is nothing of our own in the two chapters that follow. We have listened to the natives, elicited explanations, asked questions, and made note of the answers. We shall now transcribe the results. Of course the answers did not always agree, and we /78/ were forced to make choices on the basis of those testimonies which appeared most worthy of trust. The disagreements were on matters of detail only, and on the whole the statements persistently agreed on the most important points. In any case, whenever a serious doubt arises, we shall be careful to point it out.

776 576 How could Lt. Marc ever write, "We do not believe that the Mossi have the concept of a single God and Creator"? (1) The idea of God

1. Marc, Au pays des Mossi /In Mossi Country/, p. 158.

is everywhere to be found among this people. The merest wish, the simplest greeting, includes the name of God. When someone is going away, the person who is leaving and those who are staying hold the following exchange: "May God be with me," says the one who goes; "May God see you home! May God cause you to return! May God move your legs!" answer those who remain.

Persons who receive gifts tell their benefactor: "May God keep you! May God cause you to remain a long time (on this earth)! May God reward you! May God repay you!"

If a friend is seen wearing a new garment, this occasions another greeting: "May God allow you to wear it out before you discard it!"

If he is eating, he is told: "May God cause you to profit by it!"

If he comes to announce the birth of an heir: "God grant that you may suspend him from your shoulder!" /Tr., Mossi children from age [854] two or thereabouts are often carried astraddle the hip and holding on to the shoulder./

If he is leaving to return on the same day: "May God grant us the pleasure of talking to each other!"